

# MB Stone Restoration & Supply, Inc.

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## The Bare Truth About Stone Impregnator-Sealers

The past 12 to 15 years witnessed the birth and phenomenal surge of a type of product for which nobody had ever felt the need for since mankind started to use stone, which means since the stone-age! All of a sudden, the last decade of the twentieth century brought about the awareness that, without it, we could no longer live!

I'm talking about sealers for stone, better defined as “impregnators.”

What happened that caused this kind of frantic need for something that nobody ever needed before just about overnight?

Ignorance happened!

North America and most Northern European countries (that had no stone culture to speak of) were fascinated by a product that they always admired and craved for, but could never afford. The affordability factor, however, was not as much a cost issue, as it was an issue of lack of the specific craftsmanship necessary to process it. I'm talking about marble, limestone, granite, etc. Up until a generation ago, stone tiles had not even been invented yet, and the slabs were delivered to the fabrication shop right off the gang-saw; that is, neither one of their two sides were calibrated and polished like they are now. It was the fabricator who had to process the surface of one side of the slab, by calibrating it (grinding), honing and polishing! All this without mentioning the machinery and tooling that were available back then! Marble and granite floors were made by using unfinished cuts of stone (the only ones available) that were set directly on the mud bed, then ground and finished on the premises (“grind-in-place” method). And *that* – all the processing, that is – is the main factor that makes the craftsmen involved understand stone.

New processing techniques in the quarries and manufacturing plants, brought about an impressive reduction of costs, along with the great idea of ready-to-use products, such as polished marble and granite tiles, or *almost* ready-to-use, such as pre-finished marble and granite slabs.

All of a sudden, the whole world was flooded with such enticing and legendary materials like marble, granite and other stones, which were offered in a way where expertise and craftsmanship were no longer needed (or were they still!) and at prices that were getting more and more affordable.

Buying and selling stuff that's manufactured in some mysterious way, in some far off factory, doesn't make anyone any more intelligent about whatever it is that one's trading. Processing it does. But it's not the case here, remember!... All the processing had been

done by the factory; all we needed were just plain setters, or contractors that could use a saw and learn how to polish edges; and we could find plenty of them at a dime a dozen! Installing and cutting material that was made ready-to-use in some mysterious way, in some far off factory doesn't make anybody anymore intelligent about such material, does it! Once again, only processing does! That's why stone restoration / refinishing is the very pinnacle of all stone-related activities: *It's the only one that actually processes the stone!* And to do that, one *must* know stone.

Are we beginning to get the picture? If you add to the mix the huge number of "new" stones that all of a sudden started appearing on the marketplace from all corners of the planet (and counting), and the almost total lack of self-regulation of the stone industry, which has been desperately trying to "keep things simple" with the consequence being that the situation is so confusing that nobody knows what actual stone one's looking at, you have a big melting pot where only one ingredient is brewing: Ignorance. And to the best of my knowledge, nothing intelligent ever came out from it!

Without knowing which one stone was good for what, and without any official guidance, wrong choices and specifications became the rule, rather than the exception (the exception, in fact, was a strike of pure luck!), and problems of an unknown nature started springing up from all over the place (and still counting, of course!)

A solution was badly needed. But, alas, with the benefit of a precious few exceptions, the importers/distributors don't know the first thing about stone. The fabricators are just about there themselves, since they get their stone "education" from salesmen and invoices. And the setters? What on earth have they got to do with stone knowledge? They only install it! What about the original producers? Well, quarry owners/operators usually know their own stone, period. So, if for instance you're considering a marble quarry and processing plant, and you go back to the owners and question them why their marble "stains" so easily when it's installed, say, in a kitchen, all they could honestly do would be to break the news that's the wrong material for the wrong application, but such a "solution" – the only sensible one – would certainly not be satisfactory, would it! It would mean going back to school and learn something about stone, and nobody has time for that! Something "better" and "easier" was needed!

It is the general conception that when a material turns out to be delicate and difficult to maintain, it needs to be "sealed". The picture that most people have in their mind about a sealer and its expected performance, is some sort of "cocoon" that envelops the item to be preserved and protected, and turns it into an enjoyable, bulletproof material. With this picture in their minds, the major operators of the stone trade started soliciting chemists from all over the planet to find a sealer for stone that would solve all problems and could make them go away without stone knowledge. Of course the chemists – who don't know the first thing about petrography – started out by asking the BIG QUESTION: "*What seems to be the problem?*" The answer came in like a unanimous choir: "*STAINING!*" Hearing that, off they went to work to solve a problem that they perceived as related to absorbency, due to the natural porosity inherent of all stones.

And "**The-miracle-in-a-bottle**" made its trumpeted appearance on the international scene of the stone industry, and in a very short period of time became the "*necessity*" and what I consider one of the most overrated, over-promoted and over-applied (not to mention ill-applied!) products in mankind's history! A domestic company – one of the

pioneers of the bottled solution – even called itself “Miracle” to anticipate what one could expect from their “one-medicine-cure-all” product! Did it work?

When something sounds too good to be true, it usually is! What’s more, no matter how you slice it, there’s no substitute for true knowledge and professionalism. The much heralded “miracle-in-a-bottle” was not to be an exception!

The vast majority of the problems related to stone were stemming from their wrong specification, in part due to sheer ignorance about the real nature (geological classification) of the stone itself, and in part to the total hostility at listening to reason displayed by all too many specifiers. No canned “solution” will ever be able to overcome that!

So then, are all these impregnator/sealers nothing but a bunch of useless marketing gimmicks?

No, they are not. Absorbency of stone is a real problem indeed, and, to a certain extent, good-quality sealers (such as our **MB-4**) can help a great deal. But it must be understood that the reduction of the natural absorbency of the stone **is the only feature** that anybody can expect from a sealer. No “cocoon” and no other “protection” whatsoever. What’s more, we must above all learn when a sealer is needed or is useless. For instance, a granite (true geological granite, that is) countertop fabricated for a kitchen does need to be sealed. But let’s understand that ***the sealing is required because of the environment the stone is installed within***, not just because of the stone itself. In fact, it wouldn’t make much sense to seal the same granite installed on a formal living room, or a foyer floor (where the likelihood of staining is minimal); as it would make no sense whatever to seal the same granite installed on the walls of a condominium lobby, where the likelihood of staining is totally inexistent. Remember, ***stone is a product of nature, and the more you leave it alone and don’t tamper with it, the better it is for it!*** It’s a scientific fact, not this writer’s opinion.

But what about all those stains on marble and travertine?

They are NOT stains: they are rather “stains”, that is actual surface damage that only look like a stain (see our other helpful hint about [stain removal](#)), and no sealer on the marketplace claims to even begin preventing them! As a matter of fact, most marbles and travertine are very dense stones – contrary to popular and deeply-rooted misconception. Their absorbency is very limited and, in most instances, they don’t need to be sealed. Green Marbles (Serpentine) do need sealing, when installed in an environment where staining is likely to happen.

In conclusion, when properly and ***intelligently*** applied (stone is a natural product, and no blanket rule ever applies to a natural product!), impregnators do solve the problem of medium to high absorbency rate stones when installed in an environment where staining is a distinct possibility, but that’s all there is to them. Once again, buying into the possible suggestion that a sealer can do more than that, will inevitably lead to wrong decisions, which in turn will only lead to disappointment.

**EDUCATION BEFORE ANY SALE!** You can expect that from us.